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ABSTRACT

As school reform efforts demand that schools become places of excellence for all students, educators committed to these reforms face enormous challenges, not the least of which is the education of teachers. Although the responsibility for improved schooling must be shared among administrators, teachers, parents, and students, school reform efforts place a tremendous weight on teachers, especially those who have received no preparation for teaching English language learners. Clearly, professional development plays a role in equipping schools to meet the challenges facing these teachers. This digest focuses on professional development for teachers in culturally diverse schools. It summarizes what is known about effective professional development and the conditions that allow it to succeed. It provides three examples of professional development that are grounded in the academic achievement of English language learners as a fundamental ingredient to overall school success. (Contains 21 references.) (VWL)

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# PROFESSIONAL DEVELOPMENT FOR TEACHERS IN CULTURALLY DIVERSE SCHOOLS

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ERIC DIGEST

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# Professional Development for Teachers in Culturally Diverse Schools

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The changing face of the U.S. student population is well documented. Over the last 10 years, the population of English language learners has increased by 1 million students. English language learners now comprise 5.5% of the total school-age population, with a disproportionate number of these students in California, Texas, Florida, New York, and Illinois (Fleishman & Hopstock, 1993). And if demographic trends persist, the numbers of English language learners will continue to grow. These students are not a homogenous group. They enter U.S. schools at different ages and at different times during the school year. They come to school representing a diversity of languages, cultures, experiences with school, and economic and social power.

At the same time, school reform efforts demand that schools become places of excellence for all students. Educators committed to these reforms face enormous challenges, not the least of which is the education of teachers. Although the responsibility for improved schooling must be shared among administrators, teachers, parents, and students, school reform efforts place a tremendous weight on teachers (Clair, Adger, Short, & Millen, 1998), especially those who have received no preparation for teaching English language learners (Clair, 1995, 1998; González & Darling-Hammond, 1997). Clearly, professional development plays a role in equipping schools to meet the challenges facing them.

This digest focuses on professional development for teachers in culturally diverse schools. It summarizes what is known about effective professional development and the conditions that allow it to succeed. It provides three examples of professional development that are grounded in the academic achievement of English language learners as a fundamental ingredient to overall school success.

## Promising Professional Development

There is a growing consensus in the literature regarding the elements of effective professional development for teachers. It incorporates principles of adult learning: Adult learners need to be self-directed; they display readiness to learn when they have a perceived need; and they desire immediate application of new skills and knowledge (Knowles, 1980). Effective professional development is embedded in the reality of schools and teachers' work. It is designed with teacher input. It fosters critical reflection and meaningful collaboration. It is internally coherent and rigorous, and it is sustained over the long term (Little, 1993; Renyi, 1996; Sparks & Hirsch, 1997). Promising professional development is aligned with effective teaching and learning: "Principles that describe effective teaching for students in classrooms should not differ for adults in general and teachers in particular" (Rueda, 1998).

These elements underlie various professional development structures such as university-school partnerships (Darling-Hammond, 1997), teacher networks and collaboratives (Little, 1993; Renyi, 1996) and teacher study groups (Clair, 1995; 1998), to name a few. What these structures have in common is opportunities for teachers to take ownership of the professional development process to be knowledge creators as opposed to mere receivers of information.

## Professional Development for Teachers of English Language Learners

The above elements and structures are crucial for designing professional development, but they are insufficient for educating teachers in culturally diverse schools. Any professional development in culturally diverse schools must address specific knowledge and attitudes that are relevant to teaching English language learners. Teachers need to understand basic constructs of bilingualism and second language development, the nature of language proficiency, the role of the first language and culture in learning, and the demands that mainstream education places on culturally diverse students (Clair, 1993). Teachers need to continually reassess what schooling means in the context of a pluralist society; the relationships between teachers and learners; and attitudes and beliefs about language, culture, and race (Clair, Adger, Short, & Millen, 1998; González & Darling-Hammond, 1997). Moreover, teachers need a "vision of students as capable individuals for whom limited English proficiency does not signify deficiency and for whom limited academic skills do not represent an incurable situation" (Walqui, 1999). Finally, promising professional development in culturally diverse schools assumes that combining content, ESL, and bilingual teachers would make complementary knowledge and perspectives available to everyone (Adger & Clair, 1999; Clair, 1998; González & Darling-Hammond, 1997).

## Conditions for Professional Development

Professional development to improve schooling for all students requires a minimal set of conditions (Adger & Peyton, 1999; Clair, Adger, Short, & Millen, 1998; Darling-Hammond, 1997; González & Darling-Hammond, 1997; Nadelstern, Price, & Listhaus, 1999).

**• District and school policies must support coherent and integrated professional development.**

Many districts and schools have competing initiatives that drain their resources and dilute their efforts. It is not uncommon to see lists of district- and school-sponsored workshops tacked on school bulletin boards on topics as diverse as cooperative learning techniques, meeting the needs of at-risk students, and internet training for teachers. Unless there is a coherent and integrated professional development plan that grows out of a district and school vision for student success to which teachers and administrators are committed, workshops will lack meaning.

**• District and school leadership must make student, teacher, and organizational learning a priority.**

District leaders and building principals must have current substantive knowledge about effective teaching and learning for students and adults. They must have knowledge about trends in effective professional development and the education of English language learners. In order to make teaching and learning a priority, principals must safeguard teacher and student time, engage the entire staff in taking responsibility for the education of English language learners, model collegial relationships with teachers and students, and participate actively in the learning community of the school.



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**• There must be sufficient time and resources for promising professional development to take hold.**

Promising professional development is about improvement and change. The more complex the change process, the more unpredictable it is (Fullan, 1999). Introducing professional development calls for teachers to work together in new ways in order to improve schooling for all students. Learning new ways of working together and tackling the complexities of teaching in culturally diverse schools takes sustained time, focus, and resources.

## Examples of Professional Development for Teachers in Culturally Diverse Schools

Although different in form and focus, the following examples highlight ongoing professional development that promotes school-based inquiry and continual improvement. Each example brings together ESL, bilingual, and content teachers or interdisciplinary teams of teachers to support the academic success of all students.

**• The International High School at LaGuardia Community College (Nadelstern, Price, & Listhaus, 1999)**

This alternative high school serves students who are recent U.S. arrivals and who have varying levels of English language proficiency. Professional development is built into the governance and instructional organization of the school. The over-arching goal is to guarantee that all staff have the tools to support students in meeting rigorous graduation requirements. All staff must continually improve their ability to manage a student-centered classroom, accommodate heterogeneous arrangements, and integrate first and second language into the content areas. Interdisciplinary teacher teams work collaboratively to develop and revise curriculum, plan schedules, discuss student learning, and share successful practices. Staff members hold each other accountable through peer coaching, peer evaluation, and teacher portfolio presentations.

**• California Tomorrow and Alisal High School (Jaramillo, 1998)**

Alisal High School is an urban school with 1,800 students, 94% of whom are Latino. More than half of the student population is classified as limited English proficient. Constituting themselves as the Working Group on Race, Language, and Culture, a group of teachers set out to explore language and language development issues that helped to explain their students' performance. Professional development involved looking at research and school-based professional development models, examining student achievement data and school progress, creating a plan to improve students' literacy, peer coaching, and reporting findings to the greater school faculty.

**• The Northeast and Islands Regional Educational Laboratory and The Lowell (MA) Public Schools (Clair & Adger, in press)**

The Lowell school district is highly culturally diverse with approximately 60% of the student population speaking languages other than English. Partnering with researchers from the Regional Laboratory at Brown University, ESL, bilingual, and content teachers explored the problem of standards implementation in classrooms that include English language learners by drawing upon knowledge and experience of standards and education reform, second language development, and effective educational practices for English language learners. An essential aspect of the professional development involves four sustainable strategies: standards analysis, student work, peer visitation, and discussion of professional literature. These strategies hold promise for ongoing reform at the school level, because with practice they can be used independently. The goal is for teachers to adapt these strategies for use in school-based study groups.

## Conclusion

Demographic trends suggest that the profile of U.S. public school students will continue to be diverse. Education reform requires that educators provide quality schooling for all of their students. Clearly, professional development must equip teachers for this challenge. There is growing evidence that professional development approaches that are guided by teacher input and that view teacher learning as continual and transformative makes schools a better place for students and staff.

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